DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 184 181 CS 502 862

AUTHOR Rushing, Janice Hocker
TITLE Mass Media Criticism as Transformational Rhetoric.
PUB DATE Nov 79
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (65th, San Antonio, TX, November 10-13, 1979).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audiences; *Decision Making; *Identification (Psychology); Information Dissemination; Information Sources; *Mass Media; *Persuasive Discourse; Popular Culture; *Rhetorical Criticism
IDENTIFIERS *Critics

ABSTRACT

Most messages from the mass media operate on the collective unconscious of a culture. The ethical consequence of such identification through unawareness is the transfer of decision making from consumers to image makers. The mass media critic can serve as a mediator of the ethical problems created by such a mode of identification. As mediating influences, the television, movie, and other media critics can expose and evaluate the values that are offered by message producers and digested by the public. Critics seeking to transform the public's identification through unawareness into identification through awareness will try to develop methods of inquiry that aid in making message values explicit. If critics adopt the role of mediator, two desirable effects should occur: a change from financial competition to value competition in the media marketplace, and the development of informed audiences able to decide what media products are good, desirable, and worthwhile. (RL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED184181

MASS MEDIA CRITICISM AS TRANSFORMATIONAL RHETORIC

)

by

Janice Hocker Rushing

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Janice Hocker Rushing

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Ms. Rushing is Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

CS502862

MASS MEDIA CRITICISM AS TRANSFORMATIONAL RHETORIC

Several theorists have noted that whereas any form of communication may be treated as rhetorical by the critic, criticism itself is rhetorical in form. Rosenfield describes criticism as "an exercise in forensic reasoning," analogous to the arguments of a trial lawyer who claims a verdict based on an interpretation of the facts in light of some legal code.[1] Similarly, Brockriede argues that "useful" rhetorical criticism must function as "significant argument."[2] Moreover, Fisher asserts that the end of criticism is essentially epideictic--to assess the quality of the critical object, and to assign praise and blame.[3] Thus, criticism as an activity shares with rhetoric as an activity a reason-giving, argumentative form, and a concern with assessing values.

Increasingly, rhetorical critics are expanding their focus to include popular mass media as worthy of attention. Such attention is entirely appropriate, since mass media is by far the most predominant rhetorical forum in contemporary times. If we are to fully appreciate the role of the media critic in society-at-large; that is, if the critic is to be <u>valued</u> as well as <u>valuing</u>, we must both understand the particular nature of rhetorical transactions between the mass media and the mass public, and we must conceive of criticism in light of that nature. To facilitate such understanding, I shall argue that: (1) mass mediated messages often operate as a mode of identification upon the collective unconscious of a culture, (2) this mode of unconscious identification presents ethical problems for the public, and (3) the media critic can serve as mediator, acting to transform the identification between producer(s) and public from one characterized by

unawareness to one characterized by enlightenment and choice.

Mass Media and the "Collective Unconscious"

In an earlier essay, I argued that mass media and societal values reciprocally influence one another. Dramatic media events both reflect and instigate social change by symptomizing cultural needs, by symbolizing trends already in progress, and by projecting the collective images, fantasies, and values of the culture in which the media event is presented. As such, the mythos of modern American society is well-represented in its popular mass media creations--films, television programs of all types, advertisements, music, magazines, billboards, newspapers, and paperback fiction. Our mythos is a collectivity of widely shared values that are persistent from generation to generation, change slowly, facilitate comprehension of the world, support the social order, and educate the society's young. They are typically expressed and ingested symbolically and ritualistically.[4]

Any culture needs myths, of course--they allow a people to reflect upon its past, they express values of the present, and they provide visions for the future. When a coherent collection of values predominates in a culture's thought and rituals, such as the "materialistic" myth did at the time of the 1972 Presidential election in America,[5] the myth is a powerful vehicle of identification for the people. Not only would a culture without myths lack continuity and unity, but it would be without a profoundly aesthetic creation of the collective human metaphoric mind.[6] So synonomous is this form of story-making and telling with "society," that a "mythless society" is almost unimaginable.

Characteristics of Modern Mass Media Myths

It is the astoundingly swift, all-encompassing,

largely unconscious, and often disguised manner in which these myths are created and consumed in the age of mass media--that is, shared by producers and public--that defines the uniqueness of mass mediated myths. Marshall McLuhan has replaced Benjamin Whorf as the soothsayer of how the form of a culture's predominant medium of communication is also its epistemology. A myth, according to McLuhan, is "the instant vision of a complex process that ordinarily extends over a long period." It is the contraction, or "implosion" of any process. The speed of electricity, he points out, has the capacity of conferring the mythic dimension of industrial and social action instantly.[7] Noting that in ancient societies, myth reflected values that persisted over many generations, Newcomb recognizes the rapid shift in expression that television brings about: "Shifts in underlying meanings occur more frequently than in the past, and instead of the changing patterns of generational attitudes it is almost as if America discovers new sets of values overnight."[8] Mini-myths now rise and fall conspicuously with the Nielsons, Hollywood hits, and AM radio top-forty charts. Oral story-telling must match the pace of "Mary Tyler Moore"-to-"M*A*S*H"-to-"Mork and Mindy" rather than grandfather-to-father-to-child. Fred Silverman is simply a faster mythographer than Homer.

Mythological contraction in time is intimately related to contraction in space. Television, especially, removes the choice not to be involved in others' lives, even the lives of other cultures. As McLuhan aphorizes, "As electrically contracted the globe is no more than a village."[9] Only recently in the history of humanity have we had the dubious privilege of knowing that Gerry Ford toasts his own English muffins, Jimmy Carter wears blue jeans in the Whitehouse, and Patty Hearst chose a Lennox china pattern. At a bit more crucial level, McLuhan explains:

> Electric speed in bringing all social and political functions together in a sudden implosion has heightened human awareness of responsibility to an intense degree. It is this implosive factor that alters the position of the Negro, the teenager, and some other groups. They can no longer be contained, in the political sense of limited association. They are now involved in our lives, as we are in theirs, thanks to the electric media.[10]

We identify not only with social problems of others, but with their stories, whether those stories are created by the people they depict or not. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave us one view of the Black society in America; "Good Times," "What's Happenin'?", "Roots," "The Jeffersons," and "Backstairs at the Whitehouse" all contribute new episodes in the making of the Black myth.

Such myths in modern mass media rarely are created or apprehended in a fully conscious manner. The "intentional fallacy" posits that it is misleading to attribute the meaning of any artistic work only to what matches the creator's intention.[11] It is also naive to assume that an audience automatically grasps the full meaning of the work. The artist (more commonly plural in mass media) often acts at least in part unconsciously as a representative of the culture and thus as a receptacle for its images,[12] and the audience is usually not totally aware of the myth being conveyed. Although I have not talked to Sylvester Stallone, I doubt that he was entirely cognizant that "Rocky" would serve to reintegrate the American myths of moralism and materialism in a pattern of dialectical synthesis.[13] Neither is the majority of the American public able to articulate what Philip Wander has called the "myth of the benevolent corporation," perpetrated by such guardians of our well-being as McDonald's, Exon, and All-State.[14] Merlman regards television westerns, crime series, and situation comedies as "fertile sources of information about the collective projections of Americans. . . .

Unconscious as well as conscious expectations of political behavior, individual morality, and social norms are acted out in television entertainment series."[15] As McLuhan points out (and as I have repeatedly witnessed in the classroom), advertisements are not meant for conscious consumption. "Any ad put into a new setting is funny."[16]

Perhaps the most serious feature of these shared mass media myths is that they often disguise problematic social or political reality in a pleasing form. This disguise takes place in at least two ways. For one, media entertainment can distort reality by presenting it magically, simplistically, or romantically. Menaker, for example, points out how TV network news functions as art-entertainment--not accurate communication--as it purports. In news, he contends, the overall theme of excitement governed by order induces us to believe that Dan Rather talking at us from in front of the Whitehouse really is a hot political happening, that John Chancellor, master magician, singlehandedly conjures up a wartime light show on the map behind him, and that we all deserve the "all-of-us-are-human" anecdote (Chief Justice Berger gets a traffic ticket) at the end, for hard work well done.[17]

Whereas Menaker focuses on TV news as magic, Farrell remarks on another aspect of media news in general as rhetorical form. Media news tends to present stories in a format simple and balanced enough to be accommodated into our view of everyday life and historical events. News commentators usually apply standards of regularity to events that are outside our normal expectations, such that each story's "bad news" is balanced by "good news":

> For every criminal atrocity, or other social deviation, there is the unspoken reminder that this is not happening to most members of the audience, that the norms of everyday life treat such occurrences as unusual--i.e., as news--that we, like the majority, are among the lucky ones. The informational foreground of news, therefore, is only the most visible sign of a foreclosed social knowledge base.[18]

Farrell sees the recent coverage of the events at Guyana as a general failure in attempts to accommodate a "catastrophe" (action for which people are responsible and there is no good news) into a "disaster" (non-action for which people are merely victims and there is a balance of bad news with good). When the efforts to report good news failed--it simply was not true that half of the commune survived, as NBC reported--a "rhetoric of compensation" set in: Jim Jones' own charisma and probable "cancer" were offered as reasons for the event.

Newcomb also discusses the tendency of media events to simplify; his special focus is upon popular TV series. Although we use contemporary social problems as subject matter for TV programs, he says, we romanticize the problems by placing them in an older time frame, or we create a character from the past as hero or heroine. The values are more clearly defined in this "older, simpler" time, allowing the problem to be dealt with at a subliminal, removed, less complex level.[19] Racism is easier to handle in Dodge City than in New York City.

The second way media myths can disguise reality is by conveying hierarchically determined images in such a way as to induce the illusion of widespread public participation in decision making. Farrell describes the "spectacle" as the predominant form of social knowledge today. The spectacle is a structured, highly visual arrangement, primarily conveyed by the mass media, in which the most crucial activities related to concept-formation have been cognitively pre-selected by image-producers. The consumer of spectacles such as ritualistic religious revivals, the Superbowl, and the Bicentennial, experience them with a "divided consciousness." "Rather than participating imaginatively in the creation of a potential world," Farrell asserts, "the consumer is immediately and graphically experiencing false images of the presently ordered world." The spectacle is not

what it depicts itself as being (Disneyland's "America the Beautiful" Bell-telephone exhibit, a panoramic 360 degree color film, is not really a travelogue of America, but a 16-minute tribute to long-distance phone calls); it is above all an expression of social ties mediated by images. A spectacle demands an attitude of passive acceptance, contrasting with praxis as a form of social knowledge that is composed of an inferential sequence in which decision-making patterns are legitimated. Farrell calls spectacle the "ultimate insignia of a positivistic society"--subliminal endorsement of the society which created them. He contrasts spectacle with discourse (from discursus, a running to and fro), which includes the making of connections requiring some conscious reflection.[20]

Writing in the same vein, Edelman bases his theory of political rhetoric on the complex interaction of myth, symbols, and rituals. Politics is a "spectator sport" of constantly changing symbols that evoke allegiance to salient myths: "For most men most of the time politics is a series of pictures in the mind, placed there by television news, newspapers, magazines, and discussions. The pictures create a moving panorama taking place in a world the mass public never quite touches, yet one its members come to fear or cheer, often with passion and sometimes with action."[21] It is central to this dramatic spectacle that the symbols manipulated are remote from the people yet emotionally evocative (e.g., the Whitehouse), and that people engage in ritual acts that are empty of impact on policy, but heavy with a sense of involvement (e.g., elections).[22] The widespread feeling of participation in democratic decision-making, then, disguises decision by hierarchy--decisions by power sources far removed from the people.

Identification through Unawareness

It is inherent in all widely shared myths that they bind their believers together--that is, that they are potent vehicles of identification, or "signs of consubstantiality," as Kenneth Burke uses the term. Those believing in a myth, consuming its relevant symbols, and acting together in relevant rituals, are "both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another."[23] That is, the rituals of participation that support the myths draw attention to social ties.[24] Myths as widely shared in the mass media public are, though somewhat similar to ancient myths, in crucial respects different. As I have described them, mass mediated myths change faster, they bind more people together in imposed involvement, they are only tacitly understood,[25] and they often are consciously perpetrated by image-makers who design them so as to disguise their rhetoric of hierarchical ordering and decision-making.

Thus, widely shared mass media myths manifest what Burke calls "identification by inaccuracy," "unawareness," or "false assumption."[26] For example, Burke cites the case of humans identifying with their machines (cars, for instance) in ways whereby they mistake the machine's powers for their own, and love themselves accordingly. He also cites the kind of "deceptive identification" by which an individual becomes aggrandized by thoughts of his citizenship in a powerful country. Burke contends, "Our identification with these two great unwieldy leviathans--technology and the state--is central to the rhetorical situation as we now confront it."[27] In effect, we identify with technologically reflected and created cultural myths through mass media; when their form is spectacle, we also identify unknowingly with the values of the state. In participating in spectacular rituals, we also mistake the power of the state for our own.[28]

Ethical Consequences of Identification through Unawareness

If it is true that mass media rhetoric is fundamentally different in form from unmediated rhetoric, and that it contributes to a mass identification through unawareness among producers of media artifacts and the public, it becomes important to evaluate this form ethically. McLuhan, though far from a detractor of modern media, still expresses what sounds to me like uneasy apprehension as to the value of the electronic media's effects;

> Rapidly, we approach the final phase of the extensions of man--the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and nerves by the various media. Whether the extension of consciousness, so long sought by advertisers for specific products, will be "a good thing" is a question that admits of a wide solution.[29]

Though I think this phase in the extensions of humankind might more accurately be called "the technological simulation of unconsciousness," and that the kind of knowing extended to humanity is a tacit one, I share McLuhan's apprehension.

There are good reasons for ethically de-valuing this widespread indentification through unawareness. The most important, perhaps, is that choices among audiences as to the objects and forms of their identification are limited. First, when values are consumed in the form of all-inclusive, but rapidly changing myths, there is less time for artists and social critics to examine them, and for the natural process of evaluating through contemplation to manifest itself in incremental modifications in the myths. Thus, a culture is relatively unenlightened as to the symbols of its identification for w of examination time. Second, it is impossible for an audience to choose what values it is to accept if it does not understand its identification with such values, who is perpetrating them,

and how they are doing so. Consciousness and choice go together. Essentially, when humans are denied choice, they behave more in line with what Burke calls "motion" rather than "action." According to Burke, "Action involves character, which involves choice. . . . Though the concept of sheer 'motion' is non-ethical, 'action' implies the ethical (the human personality)."[30] Rhetoric that obscures human choice, then, is inhumane because it lacks respect for human-ness.

The low choice level of an unaware audience is compounded by the frequent tendency of people to think they are acting rationally when they participate in rituals upholding mass myths. Edelman, for instance, argues that voting is primarily participation in a ritual act rather than policy formation, and that, in common with all rituals, this one draws attention to common social ties, "and to the apparent reasonableness of accepting the public policies that are adopted."[31] He quotes the psychiatrist Wahl on voting: ". . .perhaps in no other area, save possibly that of religion, is the average person more convinced of the logical, defensible, and wholly rational nature of his decisions."[32] This same phenomenon is found in the typical attitude of invulnerability of advertisement watchers: "They can't influence me--I make purchase decisions rationally." When people act on the basis of unconscious identifications while believing in the conscious and rational manner of their decisions, their beliefs and behaviors are one step further removed from clear choice.

Another reason for de-valuing a rhetoric of identification through unawareness has to do with the relative power of producers and public. Producers of media messages are not always more conscious of the myths they perpetrate than are audiences (although they are quite aware of the "products" they sell). However, they hold an inherent power advantage as manipulators of powerful

mass media channels. By sheer numbers of people reached, creators of media messages tap a gigantic potential power source. An individual consumer only offers feedback to media producers by "buying" or not buying their products. A consumer's purchasing behavior has little influence on other consumers.

Lastly, although it might seem that the media-enforced expansion of involvement in others' lives enhances choice and thus power because it broadens awareness, the form of media myths as disguised precludes realistic understanding. That is, as a result of the media, we typically know about many more people than we directly know; as our knowledge about others increases, our ignorance of them also increases.[33] When we learn about others through media forms that are magical, simplistic, or romantic, our view of them is correspondingly typified or distorted. When we learn about others through spectacle, the manifest message is that we all share power while the hidden message is that power is in the hands of some hierarchy. The architechure of disguise functions to promote the interests of the architect, rarely the audience. Consequently, the world's spatial contraction and media events as masked combine to militate against both increased choice and shared power.

The Critic as Mediator

If the critic is to respond to the rhetorical situation I have outlined here by assessing values, that is, by praising and blaming, s/he then accepts a role that is fitting to that situation. If mass media messages de-humanize publics through unconscious identification, then a useful function for the mass media critic would be to transform identification through unawareness to identification through awareness. In this sense, if the media message is the "sign of consubstantiality"[34] between producer and public, the critic becomes a mediator, serving to interpret and evaluate that sign and the response to it. In what follows, I shall (1) suggest how the critic

might fulfill this function, and (2) argue that acceptance of this role should result in a rhetoric of identification to be ethically valued.

Mediating Functions

In a broad sense, the mediating critic evaluates values by assessing the "reasons" supporting them. I share Fisher's conviction, in his conceptualization of a "logic of good reasons," that "rhetoricians have an obligation to inform students and raise the consciousness of citizens about the nature and function of values as we have informed them about the nature and functions of reasons."[35] Fisher proposes that "good reasons" be conceptualized as "those elements that provide warrants for accepting or adhering to the advice fostered by any form of communication that can be considered rhetorical."[36] He notes that, unlike prior schemes for locating good reasons, his concept:

> requires a rethinking of argumentative forms, so that they include all modes of communication, not just those that have clear-cut inferential structures. The concept also opens a way to get at the rhetorical components of literature, film, and drama. Indeed, I think that a next step in pursuing the nature and functions of good reasons is to identify the modes of warrant in diverse kinds of communication, the ways, for instance, that narration, character, action, scene, and music induce audiences to think, feel, or behave as an author intends.[37]

Fisher also expresses a hope that the problem of using the logic of good reasons in criticism will be addressed soon.[38]

In this section, I will apply the logic of good reasons to non-inferential, non-linear forms of mass mediated myths,[39] and will also show how the critic can use the application to transform a rhetoric of identification through unawareness to identification through awareness. I [illegible] by demonstrating how the five component/questic[illegible] Fisher's logic of good reasons must be reinterpreted by the critic. For each

question, I will exemplify a critic operating with that component/question to assess the value structure of a given non-linear mediated message.

Fisher suggests the following five components, or "criterial questions" one might ask when assessing the logic of good reasons in any work:

1. FACT: What are the implicit and explicit values embedded in a message?

2. RELEVANCE: Are the values appropriate to the nature of the decision that the message bears upon?

3. CONSEQUENCE: What would be the effects of adhering to the values in regard to one's concept of oneself, to one's behavior, to one's relationships with others and society, and to the process of rhetorical transaction?

4. CONSISTENCY: Are the values confirmed or validated in one's personal experience, in the lives or statements of others whom one admires and respects, and/or in a conception of the best audience that one can conceive?

5. TRANSCENDENT ISSUE: Even if a prima facie case exists or a burden of proof has been established, are the values the message offers those that, in the estimation of the critic, constitute the ideal basis for human conduct?[40]

The first question suggests an uncovering of values; the first step in a critique, then, is a literal "transforming" of the critical object itself. The critic ferrets out hidden values, makes the implicit explicit, and interprets the complex interweaving of content and form that together make value statements. In this aspect, the critic acts somewhat analogously to the psychological projective test, play, or dream analyst insofar as the critic, like the analyst, uses clues present in the mediated message to reconstruct an array of underlying values.

Wander's evaluation of "All in the Family" deftly exemplifies an attempt to make implicit values explicit. As a

"rhetorical document," he writes, the series "works to sustain fundamental myths about American society, contains conflicts which threaten to disrupt it, and provides a comic frame through which even its most telling failures may still be integrated."[41] One fundamental American myth represented in the series is that America includes all peoples, races, ages, and religions, that "all of us are the family."

Wander illustrates how this myth is present in the series primarily by describing the characters, their relationships, and the implicit rules that guide their conduct. Each character has a counterpart in a larger reality of social conflict:

> Archie, the prototype male chauvinist; Irene who fixes appliances, hustles pool, married to Frank who does the cooking and the housework. Archie, uptight heterosexual, and his friend, a pro-football player, an avowed, happy homosexual. 'All in the Family' is encounter writ large. Symbolic worlds press in on one another in face-to-face conversation creating a space in which to explore the personal experience of social conflict.[42]

America can accommodate everyone in its "family." All conflict, however, conforms to definite rules: it is non-violent, all political and social views are balanced, and there is always a sense of tolerance. "Even the bigot is merely absurd."

Archie, in fact, is an ambiguous representative of another American myth that anyone can succeed through hard work, perseverance, and honesty. Archie is belligerent, insensitive, and blustery. But he is above all indomitable. He works hard at the dock each day, knowing it will be a bad day. He is,

> a bejowled Jimmy Cagney, scrapping against all odds. He will not adapt. And in his unwillingness to change, Archie serves both our nostalgia for inner directed individualism in a nation of clerks and our need to believe that this particular species of individualism is dying out. . . . Still there he stands, genus Americanus, circa 1850, the pioneer spirit in modern times.[43]

Wander implies, then, that "All in the Family" is a statement about American myth in transition.

The second question, dealing with relevance, asks if the values identified in the first step are appropriate to the nature of the decision that the message bears upon. Although explicit "decisions" based on cognitive problem-solving are not generally evident in mass media myths, implicit views of society are certainly present in myths as disguised. Reinterpreted for the mass media critic, then, the question of relevance would be: Is the form of the specific media representation of the myth illuminating of the values being expressed? Or does the form serve to obscure the actual values?

Whereas Wander judges the form of "tragi-comedy" an appropriate one for the values represented in "All in the Family," Farrell sees the spectacle of Superbowl 1976 as a game masking what is really a depiction of the American myth of hard work and of social class hierarchy. As the announcer tells us over and over, this is not simply another game. "What it is is an instant American ritual, the culmination of twenty successive homo ludens week-ends, the supreme illustration that hard work, dedication, and 'team play' mean prime-time success."[44] The Superbowl is also a subliminal representation of the class structure in America. One of the media anchor-persons, Phyllis George, joins Joe Namath, Burt Reynolds, Hugh O'Brien, Raquel Welch, and other "beautiful people" on a yacht trip to Miami. This scene allows us to "vicariously cavort with the dominant hierarchy, in the form of glittering, but antiseptic beauty."

But a more fully elaborated picture of America's harmonious class structure is in store. With the other anchor-persons, Phyllis boards a helicopter and flies to a bar in downtown Miami, where "the proletariat" will watch the game on TV as we watch them. Next,

> To round out our picture, we inevitably encounter, via televized street-corner interviews, the middle-class--the almost invisible White-collar workers, who offer their own instant analyses of the game's likely outcome. The overall impression, then, is of a unified social system infused with anticipation over what is, almost entirely, a media event.[45]

Farrell concludes that the Superbowl offers false choice within spectacular abundance; the form of the game obscures the real values.

The media critic answering the third criterial question, one of consequence, deals with the response of the audience to the media message. The critic not only reveals values implicit or disguised in the object, but offers commentary on how this object binds a public together. Such commentary could be "in advance," "in progress"--that is, concurrent with an ongoing event--or "after the fact." In this function, the critic attempts not to transform the object itself, but rather the identification among creators and consumers. This act requires the critic to explore the effects of the mass media artifact--does it induce conformity or controversy? Does it instigate political or social events, or serve to reinforce or sanction them?

Frentz and Farrell offer an after-the-fact analysis of the impact of The Exorcist--both in book and film form. They argue that the work is best seen as a socio-historical event which "marks a watershed moment of American social change. It at once crystalized America's disillusionment with Positivism and reaffirmed transcendent Christian faith as the most viable means of coping with the problems of contemporary life."[46] Frentz and Farrell base their argument on an in-depth examination of the relationship between the myths of Positivism and Transcendence in America at the time The Exorcist appeared, and on how the structure and characters in the work functioned to alter the balance between those myths. Thus, the authors illuminate public participation in

the work through the public's identification with the characters (Regan as Positivistic Evil and Father Karras as Transcendent Good) and the emerging mythic confrontation (priest versus demon).

The fourth question, of consistency, asks whether the values depicted in a work conform to human experience, individual or collective. Whether the form of a media event conceals or reveals its values, and irrespective of actual audience response, the critic is here concerned with the "reality content" of the myth. Is the myth an aesthetic expression of the present worldview of the culture, is it outdated and in need of repair, or is it a depiction of beliefs never endorsed by the culture? Or perhaps it is predictive of the future.

In her criticism of "The Waltons" in "mythic America," Roiphe suggests that we compare this envied family to the ideal families of myths, Bible stories, and fairy tales. She calls the show "very good magic"--it scares away the "evil spirits" of loneliness, divorce, alcoholism, troubled children, and abandoned elders.[47] The myth is "real" to us because we want and need to believe it. We like the fact that the Waltons are "equal partners in their family just as truly as if they were a team of neurosurgeons."[48] The romanticism of this myth stretches credulity, Roiphe says, especially considering its setting of the Depression which, contrary to the plots of the Waltons, was not a time for the making of strong souls. Neither was poverty something you could pull through because you tried. The "disasters" the Waltons face threaten them, but never really turn out badly: "Polio is defanged. . . John-Boy's appendix doesn't burst before they reach the hospital. . . Grandpa doesn't get senile and leave Grandma."[49]

As pop culture, Roiphe pronounces the Walton myth "laughable," and rather "like the painted Madonnas one finds in taxicabs and local five-and-dimes compared with the Leonardo,

the Raphaels that adorn the Vatican walls." Nevertheless, pop culture is "very revealing of the soul." She notes a "dichotomy in our society between what we believe--the image we would choose of ourselves--and the social realities."[50] Her criticism thus evaluates the "consistency" of the Waltons in terms of a comparison between what we would like to believe and what is.

Taken together, the four steps outlined above guide the media critic in transforming identification among audience and producers from unawareness to enlightenment. I hold the last step, however, that of considering transcendent issues, indispensable to criticism, since the rhetorical critic does attempt to influence others as to what is good. The critic evaluates the values that have thus far been located and described, according to some explicit or implicit hierarchy of values--one's own or someone else's. This last function allows the critic to fulfill a necessary step in arguing significantly; as Brockriede puts it, the critic "invites confrontation that may begin or continue a process of enhancing an understanding of a rhetorical experience or of rhetoric."[51]

One of the most ambitious attempts to classify and evaluate the values in a media form is Chesbro and Hamsher's criticism of popular television series.[52] They ask three questions: "What values are conveyed by popular television series? [Step 1] How do those values gain credibility before television viewers? [Step 3] How desirable are the values conveyed by television series? To answer their first two questions Chesebro and Hamsher construct a matrix of "substantive characteristics" (Burke's pollution, guilt, purification, and redemption) and "formal characteristics" (Frye's irony, mime, leader-centered, romance, and myth). They then locate the values in and explain the credibility of, one series of each of the five forms, using the matrix components. For each representative of a formal type, the authors offer

their judgments of goodness and badness. For example, as a result of analyzing "Mary Tyler Moore" as an example of mime, they evaluate it thusly:

> The form assumes that conflicts are really only 'differences of opinion' rather than profound confrontations. All people are viewed as basically decent and wholesome. The perspective is conservative, offering a limited view of actual experience, and it may thereby preclude a realistic approach to the wide range of human relationships.[53]

Similar judgments are given for each form.

Ethical Consequences of Identification through Awareness

The argument above asserts that if we accept the role of the media critic as transforming, we may see the critic functioning to describe and evaluate good reasons. If this scheme is applied, then we should eventually be able to observe some consequences in predominant forms of rhetorical identification found in the media. Specifically, the consequences should constitute a direct response to the ethical problems I mentioned earlier--namely that mass media rhetoric limits choice and power among audiences.

Foremost among foreseeable effects is that, through raising the level of consciousness among audiences, the critic expands the vision of media consumers, so that they may choose whether to identify with producers and the rest of the public on the basis of media myths. Criticism exposes, rather than disguises, social problems. Farrell says it well: "Rhetorical criticism, to the extent that it applies, replicates, and refines social knowledge forms to the world of appearance and reality, will have extended its vision to previously neglected problems."[54] And in commenting on the role of the rhetorical critic in society, Wander and Jenkins suggest that the critic not only exposes values, but articulates alternatives: "To enable us to conceive a viable alternative to a current perspective is to strip away the seemingly concrete nature of current reality--to provide us

with an option. To provide options is in turn to offer freedom, for freedom means the ability to choose; the ability to choose, of course, depends on recognition of choice."[55] The transforming critic, then, aids audiences in acting rather than moving.

Secondly, the critic as mediator is also a restorer of power balance among producers and public. When an audience is made aware, en masse, of the potential signs of consubstantiality in a media event, it can decide to unite and identify in opposition to the values represented, rather than in compliance with them. Thus, the influence of the producers in terms of numbers of people is lessened. Also, when an audience sees through a disguise, it is better able to criticize the values represented, and it is less vulnerable to control. Ultimately, then, the transforming critic works to change the nature of competition in the media marketplace from one based on finances to one based on values.

Conclusions

I have argued that mass mediated messages operate as a rhetorical mode of identification upon the collective unconscious of a culture, that this presents ethical problems, and that the media critic can respond to these problems by acting as mediator between producers and public--by exposing and evaluating values. This viewpoint has implications both for future media criticism, and for the position of the media critic in society.

Clearly, the critic who operates to transform identification through unawareness to identification through awareness, will try to develop methods which aid in making values explicit. One such method is model criticism, which attempts to develop theories that explain various rhetorical transactions, and to use those models to explain and illuminate individual events.[56] Two such recent critical works on media are the Chesebro and Hamsher article cited above,[57] and Rushing and Frentz's model to explain the interaction of film with social change, a model subsequently applied to the film "Rocky."[58] Other methods need to be developed

to help the critic as mediator to identify values.

I have often asked people what they think of the media critic as a professional. Typically, they offer extremely negative evaluations, to the effect of, "critics are people who can't make a living as artists, so they knock what artists do to protect their own egos."[59] Indeed, perhaps our estimation of critics is captured implicitly in our assigning them the role of epideictic rhetoricians. For the epideictic rhetorician is an "occasional speaker"--one who entertains by delivering orations at places like athletic contests, funerals, commencements, and banquets. Though there is certainly nothing wrong with criticism as entertainment through praise and blame, such a conceptualization fails to do justice to the broadness of the critical role. An article which praises and blames a media event only is "reviewing"; "criticism" requires interpretation and enlightenment.

If critics adopt this role of mediator, then, I see two desirable ultimate effects. First, in effecting a change in the media marketplace from one based on financial competition to one based on value competition, the real quality of media products should be enhanced. Instead of gearing media events to sell to uninformed audiences, producers will have to gear them to sell to audiences informed in terms of values. And finally, rather than serving as entertainers only, critics perform what Wallace calls the "advisory" function of rhetoric--they advise audiences as to what is good, desirable, and worthwhile.[60] Critics return to the arena of the polis. As Farrell warns:

> If current rhetorical theorists sometimes resemble--in function, at least--the patient monks and scribes of a medieval era, one possible reason for this may be the all-but-total detachment of contemporary rhetorical theory from its traditional socio-political milieu.[61]

Let us view media critics-as-rhetoricians as agents of enlightenment, then, rather than monks. Perhaps then the critic will earn a role in society as valuable as well as valuing.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Lawrence W. Rosenfield, "The Anatomy of Critical Discourse," Speech Monographs, 35 (March, 1968), 55.

[2]Wayne Brockriede, "Rhetorical Criticism as Argument," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 60 (April, 1974), 165-74.

[3]Walter R. Fisher, "Rhetorical Criticism as Criticism," Journal of Western Speech Communication, 38 (Spring, 1974), 75-80. Also see Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "'Conventional Wisdom--Traditional Form': A Rejoinder," QJS, 58 (December, 1972), who argues that the impulse of criticism is epideictic while the method is forensic, p. 454.

[4](Author) and Thomas S. Frentz, "The Rhetoric of 'Rocky': A Social Value Model of Criticism," WJSC, 42 (Spring, 1978), 63-72. The model outlined in this article dealt with film, since the critical object in this case was the film "Rocky." The model should apply equally well, however, to other mass mediated events, particularly those that are dramatic in form.

[5]Walter R. Fisher, "Reaffirmation and Subversion of the American Dream," QJS, 59 (1973), 160-67.

[6]Bob Samples, The Metaphoric Mind (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1976).

[7]Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 25.

[8]Horace Newcomb, "Toward a Television Aesthetic," in Television: The Critical View, ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), p. 284.

[9]McLuhan, p. 5

[10]McLuhan, p. 5.

[11]Rosenfield, p. 63.

[12](Author) and Frentz, 65; Rosenfield, 63.

[13]Thomas S. Frentz and (author), "The Rhetoric of 'Rocky': Part Two," WJSC, 62 (Fall, 1978), 231-40.

[14]Philip Wander, TV: The Reality Machine (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, in press).

[15]Richard M. Merlman, "Power and Community in Television," in Newcomb, TV: The Critical View, p. 87.

[16]McLuhan, p. 228.

[17]Daniel Menaker, "Art and Artifice in Network News," in Newcomb, TV: The Critical View, pp. 113-19.

[18]Thomas B. Farrell, "Catastrophic News as Rhetorical Form," paper presented at the Western Speech Communication Association's convention, Los Angeles, February 19, 1979, pp. 3-4.

[19]Newcomb, "Toward a Television Aesthetic,"

[20]Thomas B. Farrell, "The Forms of Social Knowledge: Praxis and Spectacle," paper presented at the Speech Communication Association's convention, San Francisco, December, 1976.

[21]Murray Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics (Urbana, Illinois: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1976), p. 5.

[22]Edelman, pp. 3, 6.

[23]Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), p. 21.

[24]Edelman, p. 3.

[25]It is not true, of course, that the meaning of myth in ancient societies was wholly understood at an explicit, conscious level. However, at least believers were able to articulate the form of the story, if not all levels of meaning.

[26]Kenneth Burke, "The Rhetorical Situation," in Communication: Ethical and Moral Issues, ed. Lee Thayer (London: Gordon and Breach Science, 1973), p. 269. The first two kinds are "identification by sympathy, actual or simulated, enduring or transitory," and "identification by antithesis," the clearest instance of congregation by segregation.

[27]Burke, "The Rhetorical Situation," p. 270.

[28]Edelman; Farrell, "The Forms of Social Knowledge..."

[29]McLuhan, pp. 3-4.

[30]Kenneth Burke, The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology (1961; rpt. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1970), p. 41.

[31]Edelman, p. 3.

[32]C. W. Wahl, "The Relation Between Primary and Secondary Identifications: Psychiatry and the Group Sciences," in Eugene Burdick and Arthur J. Brodbeck, American Voting Behavior (Glencoe, Ill., 1959), p. 263.

[33]John Lofland, Analyzing Social Settings (Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth, 1971), p. 2.

[34]Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, p. 21.

[35]Walter R. Fisher, "Toward a Logic of Good Reasons," QJS, 64 (December, 1978), 376-84. See also Karl R. Wallace, "The Substance of Rhetoric: Good Reasons," QJS, 49 (1963), 239-49; and Wayne C. Booth, Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1974).

[36]Fisher, "Toward a Logic of Good Reasons," 378.

[37]Fisher, "Toward a Logic of Good Reasons," 378.

[38]Fisher, "Toward a Logic of Good Reasons," 378.

[39]By referring to mass media myths as non-linear, I do not mean to exclude print media. Rather, I am referring to the broad conceptualization of mass media rhetoric used in this paper--that is, its mythic functions.

[40]Fisher, "Toward a Logic of Good Reasons," 381.

[41]Philip Wander, "Counters in the Social Drama: Some Notes on 'All in the Family,'" in Newcomb, Television: The Critical View, p. 35.

[42]Wander, "Counters . . .," p. 37.

[43]Wander, "Counters . . .," p. 42.

[44]Farrell, "The Forms of Social Knowledge . . .," p. 20.

[45]Farrell, "The Forms of Social Knowledge . . .," p. 23.

[46]Thomas S. Frentz and Thomas B. Farrell, "Conversion of America's Consciousness: The Rhetoric of The Exorcist," QJS, 61 (February, 1975), 40.

[47]Anne Roiphe, "Ma and Pa and John Boy in Mythic America: The Waltons," in Newcomb, Television: The Critical View, p. 67.

[48]Roiphe, p. 70.

[49]Roiphe, p. 71.

[50]Roiphe, p. 73.

[51]Brockriede, 174.

[52]James W. Chesbro and Caroline D. Hamsher, "Communication, Values, and Popular Television Series," in Newcomb, Television: The Critical View, 6-25.

[53]Chesebro and Hamsher, p. 16.

[54]Farrell, "The Forms of Social Knowledge. . . ," pp. 26-27.

[55]Philip Wander and Steven Jenkins, "Rhetoric, Society, and the Critical Response," QJS, 58 (Dec., 1972), 447-48.

[56]Rosenfield,

[57]Chesebro and Hamsher,

[58](Author) and Frentz. See also Frentz and (author).

[59]Lawrence Christon, "Make Money Writing Short Paragraphs," Los Angeles Times, March 30, 1977.

[60]Wallace.

[61]Farrell, "The Forms of Social Knowledge . . . ," p. 2.